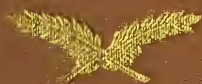


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JOSEPH HENRY GEST



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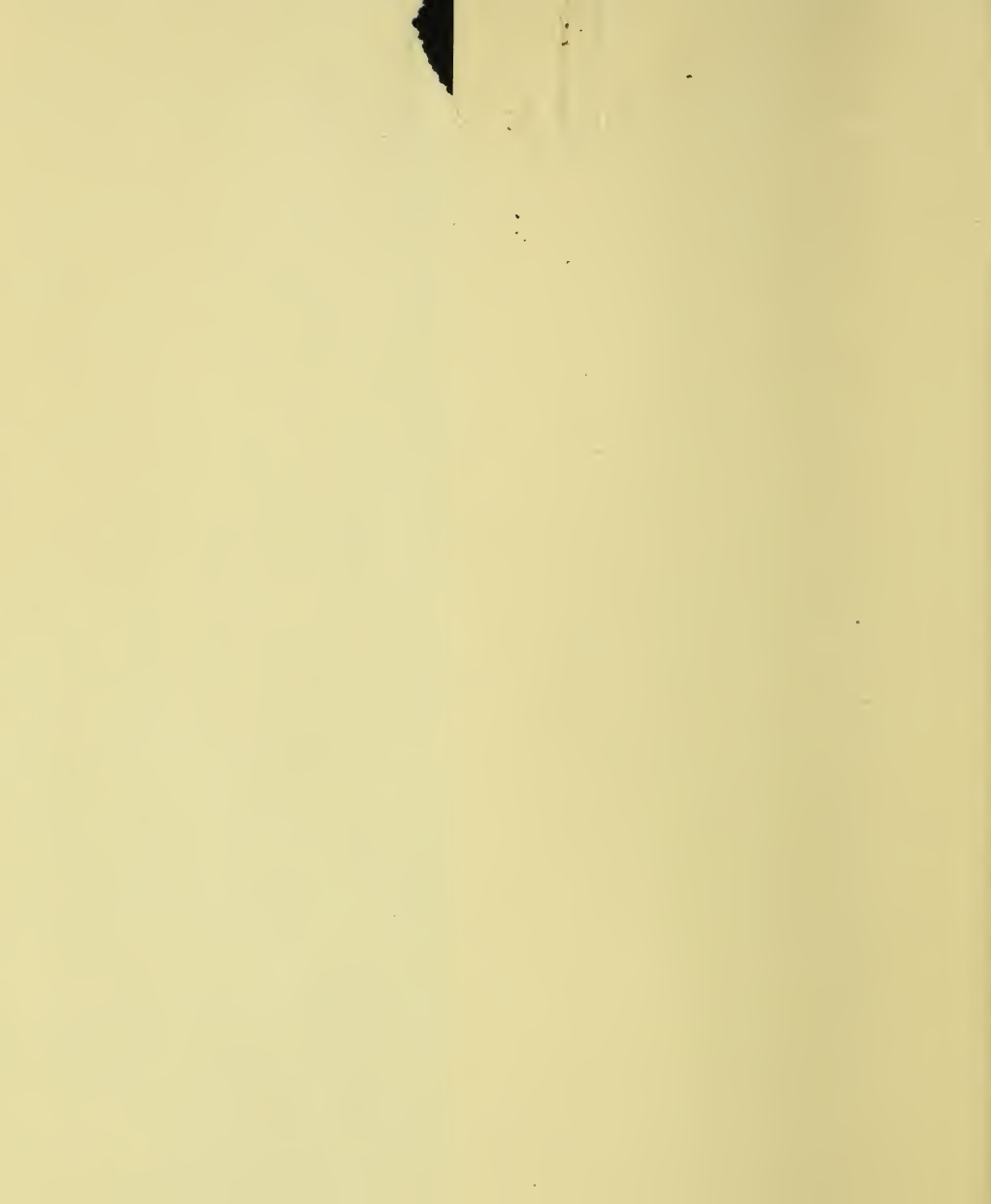
Miss Hollogg.

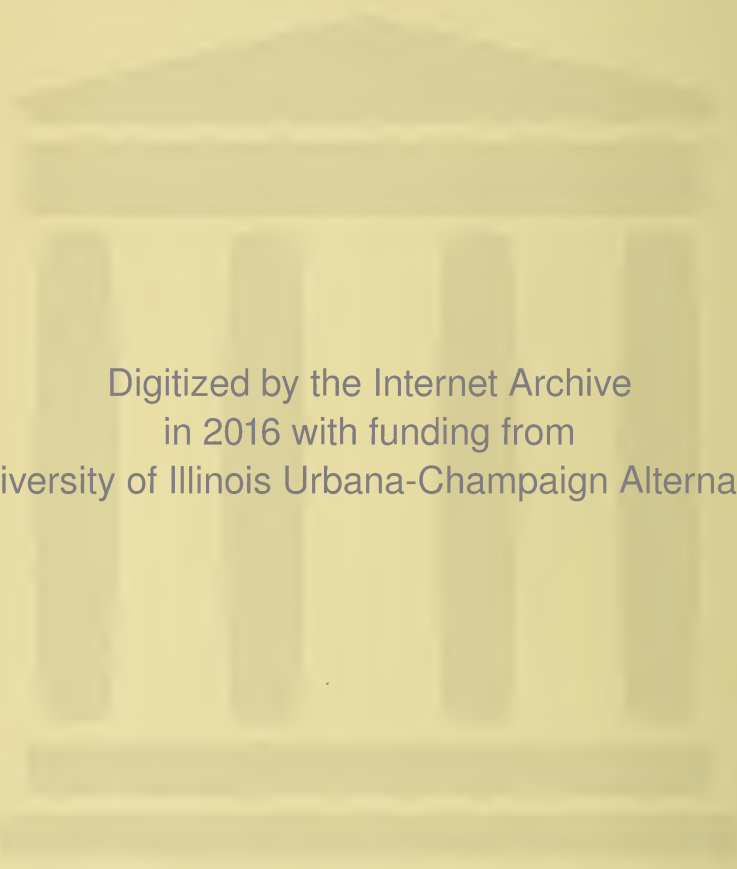


This sketch of Joseph Henry Gest and his service to art has been contributed to by too many persons to name in so small a book. Not many copies have been printed but they are being widely distributed, to friends, in the main, with the wish that they be passed on to congenial, permanent homes in libraries where people may find and use them not only as a record of notable character and achievement but also as a guide to finer and happier living.

An effort has been made to present the monograph in a form which would have pleased Mr. Gest. He liked and used the rather square proportions for printing and this Cheltenham type. The appearance of the book should be credited to two old students of the Art Academy of Cincinnati, Dorothy Goodwin Blodgett and Arthur E. Curtis, who saw it through the press.



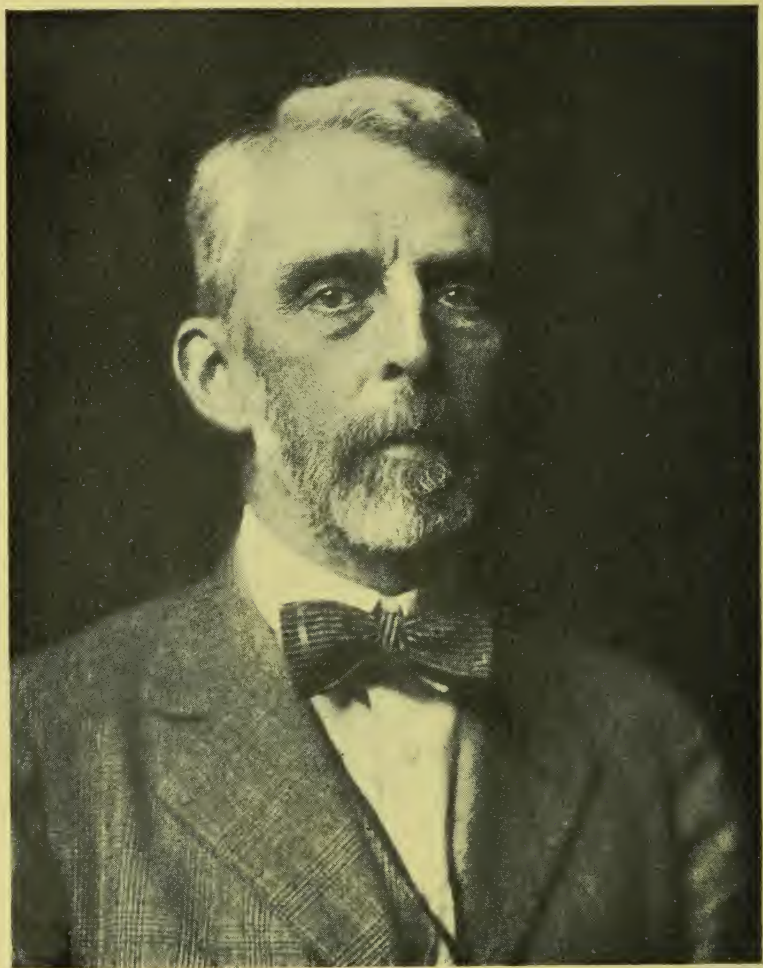




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“Through sunshine and shadow
Flows the river of life
With a warm hearted home
Embowered on its banks
A refuge from struggle and strife.”



J. A. Scott

MEMORIES OF
JOSEPH HENRY GEST

GENTLEMAN . SCHOLAR . ADMINISTRATOR
AND ARTIST

COLLECTED BY
ELIZABETH R. KELLOGG

THE BYWAY PRESS
CINCINNATI
1937

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H. BATCHELOR 6 May 1937

These memories of Mr. Gest, gleaned from the fortunate individuals who were associated with him in his years of active service, have been brought together in an effort to present a more complete record of his unusual personality and of the character and value of his work.

Since he influenced vitally the art life of Cincinnati for more than a generation, it is hoped that such a record may prove of value as a link in the chain of our finer American tradition. It is hoped even more, perhaps, that it may give fresh inspiration and courage to others whom nature has fitted to live their lives and do their work in Mr. Gest's quiet, personal, free way.

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JOSEPH HENRY GEST

For nearly fifty years, with quiet, unceasing and unswerving purpose Joseph Henry Gest* guided the destinies of art in Cincinnati through his work in the Cincinnati Museum, the Art Academy of Cincinnati and the Rookwood Pottery.

In these three institutions there were crystallized, in the 1880's, art interests which had permeated the community since its foundation nearly one hundred years before.

The Cincinnati Museum Association, organized by a group of men in 1880 and incorporated in 1881, took over the work of an association of women, enlarged its scope, increased its resources and with sweeping vision and fearless energy started out to cover the entire field of local museum work except where it was already occupied by others. Specialization in art was indicated from the beginning and the Art Academy of Cincinnati was almost immediately transferred to it by McMicken University (later the University of Cincinnati) of which it had been a department, actually the first department to function. Thus, the new buildings for the Museum and Art Academy rose side by side (1886-1887) on the same hilltop in Eden Park, overlooking the beautiful Ohio River valley and the heart of the city in its basin among the hills. Mr. Gest joined the staff of the Association in 1886.

*For compact biographical notes and estimates please turn to the Harvard Memorial on page 36 and the Memorial of the Woman's Art Club of Cincinnati on page 37.

The Rookwood Pottery, founded in 1880 by Mrs. Maria Longworth Storer and destined to become world-renowned, in 1892 built its permanent home on Mt. Adams, a hilltop near the Museum and Art Academy. It had already developed into a stable art industry under the wise leadership of William Watts Taylor working in close harmony with a board of directors who were idealistic in spirit and distinguished, as well, for business ability. Mr. Gest was an active member of this board and from 1902 when he was made Vice President he devoted half of his time to administrative work at Rookwood thus binding it more closely to the Museum and strengthening its policy of choosing its decorators from among the advanced students of the Art Academy. The belief in "home" talent was a marked characteristic and it imparted a spiritual quality of very unusual flavor which grew stronger as the institutions developed.

This spirit was particularly congenial to Joseph Henry Gest who possessed in a high degree the ability to deal with and develop the individual worker. It was regarded by his associates as his most notable characteristic and through it, while building up three great institutions, he was also enabled to build up hundreds of men and women. He had an extraordinary gift of making fine things seem desirable and obtainable. And he had as many ways of arousing interest in and enjoyment of fine things and of implanting a determination to attain them as he had differing types of humanity to deal with in the motley assortment of laborers, artisans, artists and students with whom, through whom and for whom he worked. Thus, to his men he represented at once the considerate gentleman and the master to be reckoned with, thoroughly informed concerning the problems of their work. To the manager of his men, only too conscious of the value of tact, he was the diplomat whose station

belonged far above and beyond the one in which fate had placed him. To his cashier he was the patient, kindly chief without whose skillful help order could never have been kept in a formidable array of figures. To his secretary the acuteness and profundity of his mind and the beauty and subtlety of his English were miracles, daily renewed. To his librarian he was the fountain head of knowledge, of wisdom and of inspiration who could open up in a moment more vistas of enticing activity than could be explored in a month.

While Mr. Gest's individual associates were stimulated by his understanding of their various tasks, they all, alike, respected his way of working out the problems in his own particular field. They enjoyed the beautiful little books and leaflets which came from the rickety old Museum press. These were "printing jobs" which Mr. Gest designed and all but set the type for having, indeed, transformed one of his janitors into a printer worthy of an art museum. They gloried in the taste with which he arranged a gallery, creating his background of just exactly the right tint and tone. It took days of patient experiment for him to discover the right wall color but when found, it proved to be, for every object displayed against it, what a sympathetic accompaniment is to the voice of a singer. His experiments before determining a color scheme were never made at random. In preparing the Ropes Gallery to hold the Oriental fabrics he used a method which was characteristic. The Museum's rich collections of India shawls and cotton prints, Javanese batiks and embroideries from the Near East presented a difficult problem because of their wide range of color. Mr. Gest began by considering the factor common to all: that they had been originally designed to be worn by the dark skinned races who made them. The wall, then, must be dusky with a warm undertone. This problem worked out so successfully that he felt encouraged to attempt a long

considered experiment in the painting galleries and before he got through with it those battered old burlap walls were transformed by his use of stencils into rich damasks or dim tapestries. His arrangement of a certain exhibition of silks from one of our great American mills was an unforgettable experience to those who assisted him. There were about one hundred full length samples, ranging through every period of design and every conceivable color scheme and it seemed impossible that all could be displayed to advantage in a small gallery, the only one available just then. Yet, when the cases were filled and closed, the color sequences were like the transitions which delight one in following through a fine program of orchestral music where the rich sonorities and eloquent line of the classics make way, with grace, for the jubilant rhythms of a Smetana or the delicate suggestions of a Debussy.

Mr. Gest's staff took an extraordinary pride in seeing him with the learned and distinguished visitors who came to the Museum from time to time, illustrious figures in the world of art with whom he walked *pari passu*. Such men and women learned much from Mr. Gest while he, on his part, never failed to reap from them a golden harvest of ideas for the enrichment of the Museum and its work. Often these visits proved not only useful and pleasant but dramatic in effect. Especially so was the impact, just before the world war, of the two great Dutch connoisseurs of painting, Doctor Bredius, of the Hague and Mr. Kronig, of Haarlem. Their astonishment at finding Titian's "gold and silver canvas" of Philip II, just come to America, reposing in royal retirement in an inner room of the Museum and their animated recital of when and where they had seen it before and of other matters related to it proved the introduction to a truly exhilarating review of Cincinnati's Old Masters.

While Mr. Gest greatly enjoyed the occasional visits of such experts as these, he was equally happy when imparting to his fellow workers his own ripe wisdom. He had an unusual gift of linking cause and effect in a fresh and striking way and of tracing the continuity of history. He objected to the use of the word "beauty" in discussing a work of art, preferring "character." But as he talked, character was seen to be beautiful. The world became altogether a more reasonable, pleasanter, a *safer* place to live in as one talked with Mr. Gest. Tall and of dignified bearing, his manner was almost shy until the greeting of a friend or a personal appeal from anyone called forth the quick, courteous response.

His way of clarifying a subject was absolutely his own, as pungent as it was individual. When asked whether an art student should not be learning the history and canons of art along with his intensive studio practice, he smilingly shook his head. "Not necessarily," he said. "Too much information sometimes spoils things. If the boy is told there's a wild cat round the corner he usually loses his chance to bring back its skin." In a letter to a friend he once said: "Just at present I am equally intent upon a modification of a driving stroke in golf and an architect's design for a community mausoleum to be made of Rookwood. Tomorrow it may be something else." In another connection: "It is all right,—not the least thing wrong about it,—except perhaps my own odd fancy for enjoying this wonderful world and the marvellous things in it. I sometimes feel like my favorite 'squinch,' squeezed in between the square and the dome,—with a double point of view, squinting both ways at once—and belonging wholly to neither." The scope of his interests was indeed wide and he worked and played with an impartial and sustained intensity of mental vigor.

Mr. Gest spoke often of how richly the artist was rewarded for

the long and arduous labor of training his eyes to perceive form and color which to the layman mean very little. As long as the artist has his eyes to see with and something—anything—to look at, he can never be bored! It happened, once, that a stranger came to Cincinnati and made an appointment for an interview at the Museum. As bad luck would have it, something went wrong with the car line and the visitor was not only delayed but had to climb up a steep hillside on foot. He arrived breathless and fuming, scrambled through his interview and departed as hastily as he had come. Some one smiled at his state of agitation. "Too bad," said Mr. Gest, mildly. "He seems to be in rather too much of a hurry and he evidently does not know how to use his eyes. The sky is uncommonly fine, this morning. If he had only looked at it, he wouldn't have minded having to take a walk." He was one of those who find unfailing enjoyment in the simpler, everyday things of life and he strove unceasingly to share that joy with others.

By nature, Mr. Gest was the artist, the scholar, working out in solitude those problems which can be solved in solitude alone. It was his custom to go to his office very early and in the two or three hours before his staff came to work, to lay out the pattern for the day. He found equal enjoyment in the planning and work in which others had a share and to those others the delicate play of his fancy as well as the steady soundness of his thought, made of the work a joyous experience. It was a true coöperation and he never disturbed an assistant's self-respect by the slightest trace of superiority. Those who received their training from him were indeed fortunate for only rarely is there to be found a mind so packed with truths that are basic and facts that are salient or a spirit at once so pellucid and so picturesque. He possessed those two attributes so seldom found in combination—the classic and the romantic. He was always the

rational Greek and when aroused he glowed or sparkled with Oriental fire. His friend, William Norman Guthrie, has this to say about the contrasts in his personality: "He had bones. Yes, Norse bones. That's what made his delicacy exquisite. There was a permeating virility to his stillness. Remember he was 'Norse'—he was 'Friend'. He did not energize directly because he believed in Lotze's principle:

'Have thou the spirit of the valley.
For, lo, it lieth quiet between the hills,
And all the waters flow down to it!'"

One often wondered where his own inspiration came from, for he had only rare contacts with men of his own caliber. It came from within, for he possessed a truly creative mind, from wide and intensive reading and from brief visits to New York and Washington when the business of the Museum took him there. He made only one hurried trip abroad after his boyhood. He begrudged every moment taken from his work and from that "warm hearted home" which was the "refuge" where his joy and recreation lay.

The presiding genius of his home was the big hearted wife who made of it a happy meeting place for the artists, wits and intellectuals who comprised their intimate circle. All these were treated exactly like her own four fine children. They called her "Mother" and for them the latchstring was always out and the big dining table ready for an extra leaf. On holidays, particularly at Christmas time, they were all expected to share the work of preparation as well as the fun that came after. The decoration of the Christmas tree was an annual rite of greatest animation when everybody helped, if only with the carols, led by a chorus of music-loving youths who were privileged to sing at the Gest's whenever the spirit moved them. The picture would not be complete without a glimpse of the sparkling

hostess and Mr. Duveneck, in his jolliest mood, seated side by side, stringing shiny Christmas tree balls. In such surroundings Mr. Gest, usually a quiet and amused onlooker, found the relaxation and refreshment which made it possible for him to keep at work without the vacation periods most hard workers require. He did not enjoy crowds, nor any of the methods by which crowds have to be handled. "It is the fault of my Norse ancestors," he would say deprecatingly. "They were never quite comfortable except with their own little boatful."

"Birmingham grew so big, so big
And Stratford stayed so small."

Not that Mr. Gest was unsocial in his make-up. He loved a good comrade at golf and was a vital member of a choice group of men at his club which comprised commercial as well as intellectual leaders. These have testified to the scope of his knowledge and the soundness of his opinions on every question of public importance. His views were rooted in a firm grasp of historical precedent and of determining, fundamental traits and tendencies in the never changing "Old Adam."

It was perfectly natural that such a man, in spite of his small and practically untrained staff, should have advanced fearlessly into the field of modern methods of art education. Under his direction, the Cincinnati Museum and Art Academy were pioneers in coöperating with the public schools, teachers' college and university and in serving libraries and clubs as well as individuals by means of lectures, conferences, specially prepared handbooks, book lists, lantern slides and educational articles in the newspapers. Special classes and games for children were started very early and "docentry" was practiced before the word was coined. A great deal of this educational work, as well as the care and development of the collections

was done by volunteers whom Mr. Gest had inspired with his own enthusiasm. His "honorary" curators of archæology, arms and armor, painting and sculpture held no sinecures.

In his relations with the artists Mr. Gest was unique. He worked early and late to secure for his artist staff the opportunities for advancement in their profession; commissions for work and vacations for study. When he talked over with them something they were making, in the last puzzling stages before completion, it was often his quiet word at a critical moment which determined its success. He was the safe, unfailing refuge of his faculty in all their difficulties and the problems of their students were solved with his help although in many instances these same students did not know him even by sight. Here is a tribute from one of the artists, an old student, who had passed through the "graduate course," as Rookwood was sometimes called and into a position of importance in a powerful business combination outside of Cincinnati. Writing to Mr. Gest after his resignation as Director of the Museum, he said: "The wonderful work you did for the Museum and Art Academy in putting them on the map as among the very foremost of our art educational centers in America, raising them from a musty stagnation, can never be forgotten by those of us who were directly and peculiarly the beneficiaries of that development."

The facts connected with this rescue of the school were, briefly, these. Mr. Gest, as secretary and aide to General Goshorn, first Director of the Museum and Art Academy, was early given special charge of the Academy. His training in Europe, as a boy, had given him a good foundation in drawing and painting, and later, at Harvard, his pursuit of the fine arts courses of Charles Eliot Norton had aroused in him an ardent love of the subject. None of this, however, had served to put him in close touch with contemporary

art trends when a group of brilliant young Cincinnati painters who had been influenced by French impressionism held an exhibition of their work here. Completely unintelligible, they were laughed at, whereupon, they left their native town, never to return, but very soon to become famous elsewhere.

This misadventure caused a great stir. In Mr. Gest it awoke a determination to study more closely the problems and ideals of the creative artists of that day. He became an intimate of the younger members of the Art Academy faculty, talking with them, painting with them, planning and playing with them. He acquired an extraordinary connoisseurship in this way and, in addition, he won the friendship and confidence of the artists. It was knowledge gained thus that enabled him to bring to the Museum loans of outstanding merit. But when choice was to be made of a painting or other work of art for the permanent collection, he never failed to seek and use the opinions of the artists on his staff. It was through such concentration of technical knowledge and judgment that Mr. Gest was enabled to secure for the Cincinnati Museum, in spite of a really meagre budget, true masterpieces of American painting before they were recognized elsewhere. He furnished encouragement to our own painters in still other ways, chief among these being his pioneer work in devoting a major annual exhibition to American art alone. The record of this is given fully and with authority by L. H. Meakin, in an open letter to the American Art News, published December 25, 1909.

The value of such services to our native work was best understood by the artists themselves and many are the delightful stories told of their affectionate loyalty to their champion. One is of a visit of L. H. Meakin to the man who was then honored as dean of American painting on the annual quest for one of his canvases

for the Spring Exhibition. On arrival, he found representatives of two of the great Eastern museums already there on the same errand and as he entered the studio he heard the artist say he had nothing to send them. After their departure Mr. Meakin remarked that he supposed it was useless for him to ask for a picture. "Oh, the Cincinnati Museum is different! Yes, I have one for you." Another eminent painter wrote to Mr. Gest in 1929: "You were successful in what you did in the Cincinnati Museum because you understood and you did a great work for us all in the years past. . . . I know what your work has been and I can assure you that we, meaning my contemporaries, have always felt that you stood for what we believe in." Illustrations could be multiplied but one more will suffice. When General Goshorn died, the Trustees began to look about in the East for some one to make Director in his place. Mr. Gest, always self-effacing and still rather young, seemed about to be overlooked when the artists heard of it. "Well, boys, we might as well pack up our traps and get ready to move," remarked Duveneck. "It won't be so good here without Mr. Gest." Long afterwards, one of the painters, in a gust of discouragement suddenly burst out: "I ought to get out of this place! What with teaching young ones and hanging old ones, I never get any time to paint, myself!" He stopped with a rueful smile, then added: "But of course, I won't get out; Mr. Gest makes it too interesting." So it was with all of his staff. Few there were who did not feel bound by this compelling interest, for his spirit, gentle and benign, yet so uncompromisingly firm, with limitless vision, flawless taste, humor and poetry combined, invested all they did with glamour. They were the average run of men and women, girls and boys whom he shaped and developed to his various uses, but they did their very best for him and kept right on doing it. The letter that came to him from

the teachers of the Art Academy after his resignation tells the whole story simply and convincingly: "It is a source of great regret to us to know that we are no longer to have your full guidance in matters of the school. It is very good to know, however, that you are not leaving us altogether,—that still your influence is to be felt. We are known as a happy family, in truth, we have been a very happy one,—and happiness in families depends upon the consideration and justice of their heads. The latter qualities you have always shown us and, might we add, wisdom also. A godfather you are now to us, a little farther away, perhaps, a little less burdened with care. We wish you happiness in this estate. May your burdens grow lighter during the years; this you most surely deserve for the devoted work of a lifetime."

In the letters that came to Mr. Gest after his resignation and to his family after his death, there is always this same note of affection and dependence as well as of admiration. The national leaders in museum work speak of him as a "fine, outstanding man, level-headed and sensible, a valuable friend and counsellor." They tell of his "wise and excellent administration," "long years of successful achievement and great record of distinction," "splendid work," "unselfish service," "great influence in raising the standard of American art," and of his resignation as a "loss to our whole profession." But they also pay tribute to his "gracious personality" and "loyalty." They speak of him as "lovable and talented, my very dear old friend," of "his kindly help and advice," of a "sense of personal sorrow in the death of my valued friend." Harrison Morris, in his book "Confessions in Art," speaks of him with affection as "the philosopher of art education." The dean of American art critics writes to him: "Blessings on thee, my friend. You have been a tower of strength to the

Museum. You have been a good comrade to the artists of Cincinnati. You have been beautifully faithful to all artistic things."

No wonder that a man so loved and revered by his fraternity, to whom his profession was his religion and who knew and desired the very best, was able to acquire for his museum treasures and opportunities which his slender budget alone could never have obtained. His exhibitions were of outstanding distinction and his collections were nobly built up. Mention need only be made of the Mary M. Emery Collection, the John Josiah Emery Collection, the Duveneck Collection and the exquisite Robert Blum Memorial. The library was a treasure: "We must not stint it, when a cathedral may be had for the price of a book," he said.

In a life so crowded with work for others, it is not to be wondered at that Mr. Gest found neither time nor strength for the creative literary work which should have been done, not only for its own sake but in order that he might be perpetuated in the truest way. When his executive work for the Museum was over, he was too far spent to write. He turned instead to painting where the joy of his discriminating eye lightened the burden of concentrated thought. He made a great many landscapes in water color, oils or his favorite pastel, on a small scale, completed at a single sitting. He worked in Michigan at his daughter's summer home and also, tirelessly, in and around Cincinnati. He delighted to paint the same scene again and again under varying effects of light and atmosphere and was advancing from assured triumphs to greater ones when the final weariness overcame him. His little pictures won appreciation among the artists and such others as possessed artistic judgment both here and in the East. Royal Cortissoz, in the New York Herald Tribune writes of his exhibition in the Macbeth Gallery: "Mr. Gest, retired from the

administrative activities which so long occupied him, now fills his leisure with drawings of landscape in pastel. He has true feeling for landscape sentiment and the right delicate touch for his medium. He gives us faint, opalescent impressions, insubstantial, and charming."

Mary Alexander's review, in the Cincinnati Enquirer, of his first exhibition in Cincinnati, in July, 1933, is so beautiful a characterization not only of his work but of himself that it must be quoted at length:

"It is, in a way, an adventure for me to be writing a review of J. H. Gest's pastels . . . as for so many years people like myself who have long been associated with the Museum, particularly while Mr. Gest was its Director, have looked upon him as a source of art appreciation. His summing up of any work of art is a sensitive understanding of the spirit of an artist, his epoch and the influence which contributed to his manner and style . . .

"Well do I remember one morning finding Mr. Gest in the gallery, standing before Twachtman's "Water Fall;" a glance told me he was communicative; and then he gave me such an inspired description of that picture that it always remained to me apart from all others. This was true of many other pictures, whether they were the product of the twentieth century or of the twelfth . . .

"During those years many of us knew that Mr. Gest painted, but few, if any, had ever seen his work. Now since he has been relieved of his arduous duties as a Museum Director he has turned again to his painting and to Cincinnati for his themes . . .

"Mr. Gest is an observer of skies; he paints the land around Cincinnati in its tender mood, catching its spring beauty or its autumn opulence. Occasionally, a winter snow lends to the

twilight hour a tranquil beauty that is as subtle as the air itself. Under the influence of those serene, calm moods you feel the artist's attention, pleased and soothed, wandering in these pastels from one Cincinnati theme to another. You get a general idea of the light of fading day, illuminating skies and folding them in veils of blue, purple and rose; of meadow lands in an evening mist; of the river running like a silver ribbon through a veil from which all restlessness has faded.

"Cloistral, alone, serene, lapsing at moments into an emotional expression over a radiant sky, Mr. Gest has the distinction of being himself. His work touches the imagination, it arouses interest, it expresses the thought of a man who is always striving to release with color what the painter sees with his inner eye. Mr. Gest's pastels will always remain a delight to those who are in sympathy with the rather poetic moods, the subtle qualities of Cincinnati landscape. This is Mr. Gest's first exhibition in Cincinnati; never before has he been inveigled into showing his work to the public. Last year he was invited by the Macbeth Gallery of New York to show his work in an exhibition which included work by Twachtman, Weir and others."

It is a great pity that he could not have left a greater volume of such work, but he never found the leisure to pursue it until after he was seventy years old.

So, also, it was with his writing, or rather, with what he might have written. He should have said the final word about Duveneck, that gentle giant of painting whose character and achievement were the embodiment of all Mr. Gest was striving for. And there were other men and matters whose qualities he could have presented in such wise and persuasive words that the reader could never again have failed to estimate more truly the essential values

of art—and of life. There was a demand for papers from him on important subjects from important publishers but he lacked time and strength to respond.

On the reports of the Museum, however, and upon the labels and handbooks he lavished both time and labor. These are packed with vital facts in most admirable form. For such qualities and because of the wide range of material covered, from the masterly analyses of financial matters to the review of a great collection of old masters or the sensitive yet fearless estimate of an unknown modern, they are documents of value to the special student. Moreover, in them can be traced from year to year the struggle of a truly great soul toward a lofty ideal of widest democratic scope. His conception of the purposes and use of the institutions placed in his care and of the field they covered can be glimpsed in such scattered phrases as these: "The Museum and the Academy are steady influences for better living." "The Museum like a library meets all minds with some congenial stimulus." "The Museum is not a storehouse but a place to get ideas of the beautiful." "Honesty of character, clarity of vision, sincerity of effort are the touchstones in art expression, as in all life. They are internal standards by which we measure our personal approach to fine living. If these are held true, the external standards of worldly convention—fashion and style—take care of themselves." "Remember always that great art is a law unto itself."

One book of Mr. Gest's, not a Museum publication, has exerted a continuous influence in Cincinnati since it was published in 1920. It is his "Suggestions for a City Plan for Cincinnati," the summing up of a winter's intensive study of the subject by a committee of artists selected by him and of which he was the chairman.

Beside himself, this committee comprised Frederick W. Garber, architect, Herman Schneider, Dean of the Engineering College, University of Cincinnati, John Dee Wareham, Vice President of the Rookwood Pottery Company, C. J. Barnhorn, sculptor, and H. H. Wessel, painter; an artist committee, indeed!

In order to obtain a clearer insight into his mind and ideals we may cite a few fragments of his writing. There is a paragraph in his admirable paper "Industrial Art" which sums up his ideas of the value of art in all its phases. In this, he places the applied arts alongside the fine arts and the artisan beside the painter and sculptor. While he welcomes the art of other lands and other times, he stresses that which is our very own and he emphasizes the function of the Museum in making all this plain to all sorts of people. To quote:

"The Museum gives fully half its space to applied arts, accumulating collections of art objects helpful to the metal worker, to the potter, to the weaver of textiles, the carver of ornaments and in general the designer and decorator. It recognizes the cultural value of the work of the artisan. It urges upon him the dignity of his profession even alongside of the paintings and the sculpture which to many are the beginning and the end of art. It preaches in all its galleries the unity of art, that each manifestation of beauty is but a different expression of the same truth. Each laborer in the field of art has his appropriate language which, once mastered, speaks with equal clearness to all. The one has something to say on canvas, the other in sculpture and the other on the painted vase of graceful form. Vital expression is the one really valuable quality. Let each worker know himself and let us listen and look patiently that we may not miss the message of beauty with which his work is charged. The Museum

also would teach us to be content with little things that are true, seeking them out rather than allowing ourselves to be carried away by those larger things that are great rather by pretense than any true art. If you do this, you will not buy pictures for their signatures nor pottery for its marks.

"Let us see the great art of the world, let us bring it home as we would books to a library. Let us go to it as we go to Shakespeare, Homer or Milton, as we go to the ocean or high mountain top to draw our breath and to wonder at the grandeur of man and nature. But let us come back to the home we live in, to make the most of its resources, to appreciate and enjoy what is there, for here are our associations, here our lives are cast."

These ideas Mr. Gest worked out consistently and practically in assembling and installing his collections, in teaching about them and also in allowing them to tell their own story. Objects of local interest or origin were considered first in importance and were treated as such. The darling hobbies of ardent Cincinnatians, provided only they had true educational value and the touch of the artist's hand, were welcomed even though the galleries might already be filled to overflowing. The Arms and Armor, the Musical Instruments of Dr. Doane, the Heighway, Cleneay, Goodhue and other collections of American Archæology, the unique Congo Collection gathered by Carl Steckelmann, the Historic Rookwood and other ceramic groups were crowded on top of one another but they were treasure-trove for the children and for other students who like to find for themselves the things that interest them. The entrance gallery was a wilderness of plaster casts, many of them original American works given to the Museum by the sculptors themselves. It was something of a nightmare in parts but a dream of beautiful arrangement

appeared, here and there, where a wall or a corner or the turn of the stairway permitted. And in the meantime, everything could be seen and studied and enjoyed, while Mr. Gest, with the eye of unfaltering faith could visualize them in their suitable, spacious homes of the future.

To emphasize what has been quoted from Mr. Gest's "Industrial Art," above, let us read from one of his letters:

"We refuse to make our Museum conform to the standard of any one person or group of persons, or to say, any more than does a great library, what shall be the field of a reader's intellectual activity. There are objects like books, for minds of the highest, most studious culture; there are other objects that have in them sometimes even more power to stimulate the intense life of a day so that it may rise to its fullest realization. There is the great art of the mountain of which not many can attain a real appreciation and which few indeed can ever grasp with understanding. Of that our Museum seeks its share, with a sincere reverence. But there are likewise many works of art which, also like books, are the stepping stones that lend a friendly footing that can be firmly trod. These, too, serve their purpose and in our Museum we find them comfortable companions, helpful and often happier to live with than the solitary genii of the mountain. Do we not often affect a companionship with the great when our real friends are on a lower and less pretentious level?

"So we come back to the point from which we started, of trying to find the spirit of art in the life of the day and to nourish it into a growing plant that may take its true place among those precious others which hand down the seeds of tradition."

Again, the friendly "stepping stones" of art, the "solitary genii of the mountain," the devotion to the art of his own time and

place and to the culture of the young artist to which so much of his time and strength was given!

More can be learned of what he considered the fundamentals of this culture from a paragraph in one of his little pocket notebooks:

"We are often told that art is universal. True. But no art ever began by being universal. At the start it was always local and from that became universal as the lasting qualities developed in it. Just as Shakespeare is intensely local, more perhaps than any other. So is Homer alive with local color full of the real life and the actual things close at hand. This means to the man simply what the roots are to the mighty oak, become invisible perhaps by the overshadowing of uplifting genius.

"So it is that canons of art and rules fail in themselves to produce fruit, for the slender shoot springing from the soil has back of it a germ in the artist's feeling or imagination, and that is the real law of its future growth, fostered or hampered as that may be by the environment. When we speak of the encouragement of art we should mean the attending to the fostering of this life germ toward the flowering which is its inherent destiny. We should mean this as against the laying down of law for pruning and grafting upon it that which is inimical to it. And when we add by training and education we should be careful to give that which may be absorbed as a part of the growing character and not that which is antagonistic and destructive of its individuality. This is the meaning of culture. It is not indoctrinating."

Not "art made tongue-tied by authority."

Here is indicated one of Mr. Gest's most distinctive traits, his great and unfailing respect for individual character. No one was more quick to detect and discard the meaningless piece of work.

"Drawing, a form of language, it expresses, has a soul,—speaks," says the little notebook. "Many draughtsmen dumb, having nothing to say, or failing to express themselves." But when a work of art had vitality as well as skill, when it was truly fine, there was no greater or less with him; there was just *difference of character*. The overworked illustration of the lowly violet and the glorious rose was an ever fresh reality to Mr. Gest. Each had its own place in the scheme of things, its proper function. Neither should be praised at the expense of the other. The oft recurring seeker after classified values who came asking for a list of the ten "finest" paintings in the Museum, went away with his head buzzing with a swarm of new ideas, but without his list of pigeonholed masterpieces.

Part of a letter in which he was writing about Duveneck will make clearer his manner of appraising art:

"There is one fact that we who knew Duveneck must remember, and that is that to us his personality was the great thing, greater even than his work, and that our recollection of him as we knew him is always reinforcing any canvas of his that we happen to be looking at. That we cannot incorporate in the work, but we can tell others about it, and in a certain measure we can point out to those who did not know him the characteristic reactions of his personality upon the many phases of his work in the different years of its production. You know how often we are asked to explain why he abandoned the particular kind of brush work of which he was so great a master in the seventies—as though he had no right to enlarge his view of things, no privilege to see them differently, no other means of expression than through those structural planes of bone and flesh which his eyes so heartily enjoyed in the seventies. He seems to have had enough of that by the

early eighties, and how indeed could he have hoped to get any more out of it had he continued longer. What was more natural than that he should turn to larger forms, simpler masses, quieter surfaces and tones, and also some more natural development of atmosphere and light, and, with that, some preoccupation with a color palette other than the browns of the early period. It was quite reasonable that he should do this, though probably he did not reason at all about it,—being as he was in no sense concerned with painting for popularity or profit. But it seems to me that whatever changes he made in the choice of things for pleasure to his eye, and however he modified his brush expression accordingly, there remains always in his work the same dignity, the same quiet, respectful attitude toward his art,—all part of that personality greater even than his art. This perhaps explains the depth of feeling towards him among those who knew him as friends and associates, a feeling so strong in some of his pupils that I recall several whose speech of him seemed to have an undertone of veneration that had in it a touch of awe. What makes the picture even more puzzling is that apparently Duveneck never had the least consciousness of this, but remained always the same natural, simple, wholesome nature, without affectations of any sort and without sophistication. Nor, seemingly, was he aware of the rare quality of his culture and of the wide extent of a knowledge which uncovered itself only when he happened to drift into talk among friends, when indeed it was a rare treat to listen to him.

“In starting this letter I had no idea of wandering along, and it may be that I shall withdraw sending it to you, unless I feel that you will take it for what it is,—thinking aloud as to some means by which we may try to convey to a third person what

it is we find so admirable in Duveneck and his art. I do not believe that we ourselves give much thought to what people generally call "greatness" which always seems to me a cold-blooded, standardized measure of things which for my part I am very reluctant to apply, because the measuring of things in this way involves the loss of so many qualities that are among the most delightful and finest experiences of life. Indeed it seems to me that instead of our having a sure measure to apply, it is more true that the fine things themselves are measuring us through our partial ability to appreciate them. I used to have years ago much more convenient and timesaving standards of measure for the arts; and while, of course, I have kept them and cleared them up to a great extent, it is the living quality of a thing, the reasonable variation from standards that enriches the type."

Among the few fragments of manuscript left by Mr. Gest there is an article which might be called "Suggestions to an Art Student." Though brief, it states the factors for successful work very clearly and completely, factors which he early recognized as essential. This paper, whatever the purpose for which he may originally have written it, should be quoted in its entirety:

"As students and artists we are never through with drawing,—first to acquire it and afterwards not to lose it. And the technique of painting is likewise hard to get and to hold. So the student is praised who keeps his mind on these fundamentals of all good art. Yet there are other things to which some, at least, of his precious time must be given in order to get the all round development of his faculties as an artist upon which professional success depends. If he consults older professional men about him, or if he reads the biographies of successful artists of the past, he will find that all of them have had to devote much thought as to how

best to use this precious training, as to what was best worth while doing with it, both for their own satisfaction and for the understanding of others. Choice of subject immediately asserts its importance,—a choice of something worth while from inherent interest of character and if possible, of novelty. That does not necessarily mean a great command in subject, it often means a small, unpretentious subject seen with great intensity. Important, therefore, is ability to see what is most characteristic and to select what is most significant for the expression of the interest so strongly felt by the artist.

“Next comes the problem of orderly presentation, the placing of the subject in the space the artist intends it to occupy whether that be the surface of a canvas or of a sheet of paper or the cubic inches of a piece of sculpture. So, following choice of subject comes the arrangement of its elements into a composition. Many a great artist who has been able to choose subjects of great interest and has expressed that interest with great technical power, has had quite limited capacity of composition when compared with other artists. And many an artist whose power of composition is strong gets by with a relatively weaker technical control.

“This preamble may lead you to a better understanding of a few practical suggestions derived from professional experience and from the lives of most successful artists.

“To your close studies in drawing, painting or modeling, make eternally experiments in selection and composition. Fill sketch books with your impressions of details that interest you—choose them always because they *do* interest you, and make sure that you find out why they are interesting, for it is that fresh perception that makes the sketch so lively that the task of keeping it in the finished work is far from easy. Train your pencil constantly in

setting down these observations both as to details and as to relations—compositions of movement, complete actions, as well as of repose.

“The sketch book is a great teacher in developing keenness of observation—(do you really see what is best worth looking at,—are your eyes alert)—and in readiness of expression—(can you get it over,—with all your vaunted technical training). Then remember that your sketch book is your own private sanctum where you try yourself out with no sense of publicity. Remember also that these exercises, these quick records are a priceless storehouse for the memory of experience of countless art reactions of the most intimate personal nature if only you will make them so.

“These sketch books will heighten your interest in people of all kinds and in things of all sorts. And wherever you go your eyes will find something to note. It will help you immensely in your study of the history of art to make notes of architecture, of sculpture, of painting, of ornament, of anything that is characteristic of a period, and you will find in this way that you have touched hands with the artists who originally gave expression to much of our most delightful art inheritance.”

Mr. Gest left also a short paper on “Some Vital Characteristics of Greek Art” which impressed students of the subject strongly at the time it was written because of its comprehensiveness and balance. His appreciation of the Greek was intense and enduring. In the little diaries he used as notebooks, one of which was always in his pocket until, full to overflowing, it made way for a fresh one, there constantly appeared references to the Greek. Now it was their proverbs, as “know thyself” or “never exaggerate—never go too far.” Again, there were carefully selected items on the monuments or philosophy of the Greeks from various authorities, usually

French. In letters to his friends appeared his own equally important estimates of the character and value of the Greek's contribution to civilization and of its continued powerful influence in the world today.

His greatest tribute to the art of Greece, however, was the Schmidlapp Building, that superb hall designed by Daniel Burnham as a wing for the Museum in which to install the masterpieces of Greek sculpture—in the form of plaster casts! Who else in the whole world could even have imagined, to say nothing of being courageous enough to erect such a building, for such a purpose! Yet it became, through the perfection of its proportions, color and lighting, its airy space and the fine architectural arrangement of the casts, a thing of such transcendent beauty that one forgot the cheap materials of both building and sculpture and dreamed only of sky born Olympus. "The most beautiful sculpture hall in the world" it was declared by many a world traveller. To Mr. Gest it represented the one perfect unit in the Museum, where frame suited picture and all was ample and harmonious. It rested, refreshed, uplifted him if only to walk through the corridor of approach and at a certain point to feel the lift of the great hall with the Winged Victory soaring up into its lofty spaciousness.

In this wonderful gallery few could fail to realize how much not only of educational value but of æsthetic joy can be derived from *copies* if only they are chosen with care and displayed with the respect due their form rather than their material. For instance, in the innumerable little casts of ivory carvings which formed a quaint, all-over pattern along the walls of the Schmidlapp corridor one could not only trace the development of sculpture from Roman times to the Renaissance but one could watch the great panorama of history unfold or one could feel the delightful æsthetic thrill

which is aroused by beautiful design and workmanship. The same thing was true in the large gallery that held the metal reproductions where, moreover, precious materials were present, so that it became a gorgeous treasure house, glamorous as the cave of Aladdin. The fact that everyone can possess a copy seemed just one more advantage to Mr. Gest who was always far more interested in the wide distribution of beauty than in the rich collector's standard of rarity and exclusiveness.

The gallery of Greek sculpture possessed still another meaning for Mr. Gest. As he stood in the entrance hall of the Museum, the axis of the Schmidlapp Building stretched away to the north, cool and simple in color, flooded with light, while to the west he could look through galleries holding the textile and metal collections, crowded and shadowy yet rich with a thousand tints and gleaming with silver and gold. "There you have the two great and fundamentally different types of art," he would say. "The Greek gives us form, cool logic, reality. The Oriental gives us color, emotion, decoration. It is practically useless to look for the two together."

And yet, with all his love for Greece, he twice refused the invitation of a friend to go there. The first time it was because his family and the Museum needed him. The second was after his retirement from the Museum. He wrote: "Yet still my mind remains filled with old associations of one kind and another. Many of them concern the men and women about the Museum and the School who have grown up under me. Just how I can continue to be helpful to them, for themselves and also in maintaining certain ideals that have underlain our work is, indeed, extremely doubtful. Yet it seems well that I should be here." Then, after speaking of the continuance of his work at the Rookwood Pottery, of his enjoyment of his family day by day and of the "excess of

loose ends to be unravelled and trimmed off—the flotsam and jetsam of a lifetime spread over too great a variety of interests, scattered through a maze of subjects quite hopeless to master even though one be fascinated by their interrelations,” he writes: “All through this run here and there binding cords from old Greece so that I seem never far away from the spirit of her great men who made European culture possible. These men live for me in a certain state of mind that is, as it were, a composite of almost living personalities. . . . What more can I hold of the wonderful world and the marvellous achievements of man in it?”

There spoke Mr. Gest as his staff knew him. He was the scientist who can reconstruct the vast mechanism of a mammoth from the study of a single bone; he was the air plant which draws its sustenance from the invisible void and needs no contact with the earth to nourish its roots. Through his books and his casts he was closer to Phidias than those who “feast their eyes and dream of older days” in the land which gave birth to Phidias. With what glorious inner visions he was blessed let this, from a letter testify:

“Do you know what it is to ‘bask’ in the shadow, a bit weary—for the moment—surfeited with the wonders and beauties of life as they pass in that amazing procession we cannot halt nor see beginning nor ending, as it weaves its way across the warp of time. Our single threads lose themselves in the broad fabric, leaving at most a glint of gold upon its face to catch the ‘Divine Light.’ I feel a weariness from the vastness of the vision, even though filled with tried-out faith in the spirit of human progress. Out-ranging thought, too wonderful for words, only the unchained imagination sweeps upon the endless waves.” His inner vision of the character of his well-beloved native city was not unlike

the mist of rose and gold into which his paintings often show her hills and turrets rising, like a dream of Paradise. Such visions led him forward on the long road of his work. To these he dedicated his life. He believed he could share them; and who shall say he was wrong!

A friend has called him "the wise and subtle teacher who studied *influence* and never seemed to know of authority." That influence works on and on in the lives of the men and women who fell under his spell.

From the Records of the Class of 1880, Harvard College

Joseph Henry Gest

Born April 24, 1859

Died June 26, 1935

"Joseph Henry Gest, son of Joseph John and Susannah (Bailey) Gest, was born at Cincinnati, Ohio, on April 24, 1859, and died in that city on June 26, 1935. In 1886 he became connected with the Cincinnati Museum Association, which maintains the Art Museum and Art Academy of that city. From that time until his death his life was closely connected with the progress of art in Cincinnati. At the time of his death he was Director Emeritus of the Museum having served for many years as Director. He was President of the well-known Rookwood Pottery Co., distinguished for its artistic output and on his retirement was made Chairman of the Board. . . . He was for some years Secretary of the Municipal Art Society. In 1932 he was made Chairman of the National Gallery of Art Commission at Washington, in which capacity he was serving at the time of his death. In 1887 he was married to Lillie Schultze who died in 1925. Their oldest son Frederick died in 1914.* Gest's immediate survivors are his son, Henry, and his daughter Suzanne and several grandchildren. Distance and a very busy life kept him from attending our reunions, but he was greatly interested in his classmates and kept informed of the doings of the class. Those who remember him in his college days will recall a strong personality, a man of high ideals and noble purposes. His contribution to our Fiftieth Anniversary Report is quite worth rereading and is a key to the admirable character of the man."

*A daughter, Elizabeth, died in 1915.

Memorial of the Woman's Art Club of Cincinnati
To Joseph Henry Gest

"He was a connoisseur of the finer values of life as well as of art. As an artist in his later years he resumed his work, interrupted through the course of his busy life, and devoted himself to the last to the expression of beauty, true to the promise and tenor of his youth.

"His vital energy unassumingly and quietly at work, for such was his nature, brought to the Cincinnati Museum of Art, of which he was Director, valuable collections chosen with fine discrimination; collections which have stood the test of time.

"Large bequests for the extension of the Museum to house its newly acquired treasures were made in faithful confidence in the judgment of Joseph Henry Gest, through whose foresight these provisions were made available.

"His presidency of the Rookwood Pottery carried out the ideal of his predecessors and contributed to its present prestige.

"His influence was one of inspiration to those engaged in all forms of creative art.

"We who knew him as Director of the Art Academy of Cincinnati, whether in the capacity of an associate or as a student, honored, trusted and loved him as one to whom one could turn for understanding and sympathy; as one who held the torch high in his leadership in the quest of beauty.

"To those of us who knew him but casually, there was the sense always of the exquisite gentleman, aloof in his apperceptions and yet so very close.

"Cincinnati has lost an honored and cherished citizen.

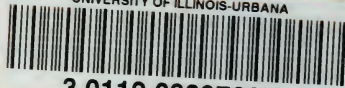
"Resolutions Committee:

Henrietta Wilson, *Chairman* Lorinda Epply

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Julie Morrow DeForest, *Secretary.*"

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